

THE AFGHAN MEDIA PROJECT

University seeks to expand its role in Afghan Media Project

By David Barboza
and Narendra Nandoo
Staff writers of The Daily Free Press

H Joachim Maitre, Director of the Afghan Media Project and interim Dean of the College of Communication said this week that the US Information Agency should "back off" and let Boston University have full control of the project.

Maitre's remarks, calling for the USIA to take a less active role in the project, echoed those of Sen. Gordon J. Humphrey (R-NH), who recently accused the Agency of delaying the project several months.

NEWS ANALYSIS

And now BU is looking to expand its role in the project following the announcement that the Hearst Corp., BU's partner in the venture, will be leaving the project in December, University and project officials have said.

Funded by a government grant, the project is designed to train Afghan rebels in journalism in order to report on their war with the Soviet-backed government of Afghanistan.

Hearst, which was involved with the dissemina-

tion, became a partner with BU in a \$500,000 appropriation bill from Congress, awarded indirectly through a USIA grant competition last February.

"Boston University has expressed an interest in expanding the training program and we're entertaining that proposal," a spokesman for the USIA said last week.

Expansion would include taking over Hearst's responsibility and sub-contracting an organization to do the work. The length of the training would also be extended by the University and BU would possibly bring a few Afghans to the University for advanced training, according to Maitre.

USIA UNDER FIRE FOR INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHAN PROJECT

Several project officials over the past few weeks have charged that the USIA is becoming too involved in the training project, thus jeopardizing the credibility of the project.

Last month, COM professor Henry G. LaBrie III resigned from the project, arguing that poor management and increasing USIA involvement threatened to make the project a propa-

ganda. Maitre has also conceded that "the USIA tried to make it [the project] bigger and bigger" by looking for more funds to make the project a more influential and accomplished one.

One project member, who asked not to be named, said last month that in a meeting with a USIA official over the summer he was told the Agency was looking to get \$3 to \$5 million to fund the government, and that this played a major role in the delaying the project.

Maitre and another project member complained recently that while some of the staff members were trying to push the effort forward, a USIA director bought a Wang Computer system for the Agency's Washington office with funds earmarked for the project. The USIA, however, said the system only cost about \$3,000 and added that the purchase was not improper.

NSC INVOLVEMENT WITH THE AFGHAN MEDIA PROJECT?

Maitre and other project officials have also said recently that the USIA has tried to get additional funds for the project through government and private dona-

approached the Pentagon, State Department and the National Security Council as well as private donors to increase project resources.

Some have questioned whether funding from these government sources could further endanger the project's credibility, particularly in light of recent developments concerning government slush funds in Washington, being funneled through agency's like the Central Intelligence Agency and the NSC.

Several project officials at both the USIA and the University have confirmed that the USIA was seeking as much as \$700,000 from the NSC.

In an interview last month with *The Daily Free Press* Maitre said, "The NSC promised money and it hasn't been forthcoming Maitre said. "People tell me the NSC will give it."

But some are now questioning why the NSC would bother funding a journalism project and where they would get such funds.

Some said the NSC was using their own funds for the project, while others said the NSC's limited budget of \$4 million would not allow it to, and that the agency was merely tapping other government sources, like the Agency for International Development, for humanitarian aid.

The NSC is currently at the center of a world-wide

debate. North, who is said to have diverted private and possibly illegal funds to support the contra rebels in Nicaragua, along with other anti-communist insurgencies in Afghanistan and Angola.

A top USIA official, who said he had approached the NSC to look for additional funding, refused to name the NSC official he dealt with because, "I can't violate our internal regulations."

Another project member speculated that the contact could have been Lt. Col. North, who was recently fired by President Ronald Reagan for his role in the Iran-Contra Arms Scandal and who he said was a friend of Maitre's.

Maitre, who confirmed that North was a good friend, shrugged off the charge as ridiculous saying, "he never spoke to North about funding the project. 'I'm pretty convinced he had nothing at all to do with the Afghan Media Project. They [the NSC] were really dealing with bigger issues," Maitre added. But Maitre said that North was aware of the Afghan project.

A USIA spokesman said that any link between the Afghan project and the NSC's recent operations is preposterous and misleading.

Maitre had met North at a White House briefing on Central America a few years ago and said North helped "facilitate" his trip to visit